

Washington, DC (July 13, 2011) – Since being elected to Congress, Gus has made it one of his top priorities to be a voice for all religious minorities wherever they may be persecuted and to continuously work in a bipartisan manner with his colleagues to condemn violations of religious freedom throughout the world.

On Wednesday, Gus addressed religious persecution at a conference sponsored by United Pease Federation USA and The Washington Times Foundation.

Related News: [Washington Times: Faith groups call for greater efforts to promote tolerance](#)

Prepared remarks are pasted below. Watch a video of the presentation here:

<http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XhadzdJ0q08>

*Good morning and thank you so much for allowing me to speak before you on this very important issue. Religious persecution is an issue that personally touches me inasmuch as I have had family and friends who have been victims of religious persecution.*

*That's why I have made it a feature of my service in the U.S. House of Representatives to be a voice for all religious minorities wherever they may be persecuted in the world from Cuba to China.*

*As a member of the House Committee on Foreign Affairs and a member of the International Religious Freedom Caucus, I have worked together in a bipartisan manner with my colleagues to condemn violations of religious freedom throughout the world. I know my time is limited, but I would like to highlight a couple of countries that have been, in my opinion, gross oppressors of religious freedom.*

*I have been a strong advocate for Falun Gong practitioners and year after year have called upon the communist regime in china to join the world of nations by allowing even basic human*

rights for religious minorities. Today's event is fitting since this week we are commemorating the 12th anniversary of the Falun Gong crackdown by the PRC.

To be taken seriously as a participant in the twenty-first century global economy, China must take the rights of their citizens seriously. Egregious injustices, such as those suffered by the Falun Gong practitioners and others targeted by the Chinese Communist Party, are unacceptable in a civilized world and must end today.

Also, unacceptable are the continued violations of religious and human rights that the Republic of Turkey has perpetrated against the Ecumenical Patriarchate, the Holy See for over 300 million Orthodox faithful worldwide. The government of Turkey has failed to recognize the Ecumenical Patriarchate's international status; it has limited to Turkish nationals the candidates available to the Holy Synod for selection as the Ecumenical Patriarchate; it has failed to reopen the Theological School at Halki, thus impeding training for the clergy; and has confiscated 75 percent of the Ecumenical Patriarchate properties.

This type of behavior from a so-called secular democracy is deplorable in today's world. I will continue to call for the government of Turkey to: Grant the Ecumenical Patriarchate appropriate international recognition and ecclesiastic succession; Grant the Ecumenical Patriarchate the right to train clergy of all nationalities, not just Turkish nationals; and, Respect human rights and property rights of the Ecumenical Patriarchate.

Further as it relates to Turkey, late last year before the 111th Congress adjourned, I was able to pass H Res 1631 which called for the protection of religious sites and artifacts from and in Turkish-occupied areas of northern Cyprus as well as for general respect for religious freedom. It held the Government of Turkey responsible for the continued violations of humanitarian law with respect to the destruction of religious and cultural property. I am happy to say that it passed unanimously with strong bipartisan support.

The resolution caught the eye of the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom. As a result, the Commission embarked on a fact-finding mission to the northern occupied territory.

Chairman Leonard Leo and members of the commission prepared a report which echoed the

*sad truth that we had outlined in our resolution. I am so thankful that the greater community at large is starting to take notice of what all of us have known for decades.*

*Unfortunately China and Turkey are just two examples in a world full of oppressive governments which continue to persecute religious minorities for simply trying to engage in one of the most basic of human endeavors: the right to worship freely.*

*I commend the Washington Times for being a consistent singular voice in the vast media that reports with integrity and courage on the plight of the voiceless.□*

*Together with you, I will continue to support the inalienable right to freedom of religion and expression recognized in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights that applies to all people.*

*Thank you and God bless.*